SECTION III

PROJECTION OF WOMEN ON INDIAN ELECTRONIC MEDIA
CHAPTER—16

WOMEN AS PROJECTED ON MEDIA

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

If the image of women on television today reflects — or affects reality — then women all over the world must be writhing in agonies of self-contempt. For television’s image of the woman is either a stupid, insecure little household drudge being continuously exploited by all other men and glorifying her suffering as self sacrifice, or the vicious vamp (the other name for a so called modern woman) flaunting herself in front of men and plotting nasty revenge against all men and women who dare to cross her path.

In all the television commercial, family sit coms, soap operas, game shows, drama shows, serious documentary and ordinary reportage of the issues and news of our world, a positive image of woman is virtually non existent or even missing in some cases.

In fact the most puzzling thing about the image of women on the electronic media is an eerie, twilight zone sense that it is fading before ones eyes. In the bulk of television programmes today and even increasingly in commercials one literally sees no image of woman at all. Even when the face and the body of a woman are there one feels a strange vagueness and emptiness, an absence of human identity.

The whole process of the feminine mystique is projected on television to such an extreme that the question, is not only what the mystique and its stunted, dehumanized sick image of woman is doing to the real woman and their respect for themselves, or men’s love and respect for women, but what it is doing to television.

Communication research about women and the media has been fruitfully explored in terms of the content of the media message or the images projected of women by the media. Although this has been some of the most precise and most often done research it is very depressing to find that this thoroughly documents symbolic annihilation. Commenting that the image of women in the mass media is changing for the worse, George Gerber states that instead of “mediating even the actual social change that is taking place, the media appears to be cultivating resistance and preparing for a last ditch defense”.

The message content generally has been analysed via the specific media institution. In the print media, most attention has been paid by researchers to newspaper women’s pages and women’s magazines.

Women’s magazines also have been the subjects of content analysis, since one would expect that magazines for a females audience would not convey degrading message. But the bulk of the research contradicts this hypothesis.
Of the electronic media, television content thus far has been most frequently and systematically analyzed by researchers. These include studies of television commercial and children’s programmes.

In the 1970s in countries like North America, Japan, Korea and the Philippines, quantitative social science methods were adapted to study the content analysis of sex roles and media stereotypes. These studies documented women’s exclusion from many media forms and went on to perpetuate the so-called behavioral, aspirational and psychological differences between men and women.

On the other hand they all differentiate between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ images of women. ‘Positive’ image would show women as autonomous, self-fulfilled, authoritative, successful etc. The results of this operational coding is to perpetuate a view of society in which women are defined as the problematic or dominant sex.

In order to ascertain how women are projected through the television programmes, it was considered important to critically look at not only the special programmes meant for them but also at the general programmes which are presumed to be of marginal interest to women.

Also the continuous debate on the need for special programmes for women as opposed to the integration of women’s concerns into all aspects of programming continues unabated. The rational for specific programmes for women is that they cater to the specific needs of women and that they can be structured and timed in order to draw their attention and ensure their maximum involvement.

‘Women’s programmes’ is somewhat of a misnomer. This gives the impression that the programmes are meant for women alone and that they are the sole target audience. Women’s programmes ideally should have a broader definition to include all programmes dealing with the issues, problems and aspirations of women. This definition of women’s programmes has the advantage of making them much more broad based and can bring in women’s dimension in all aspects of programming and not confining it to stereotypes of cookery and childcare.

To study the representation of women on media the percentage of women’s programme is only one criterion to look at. Any research should impart a multidimensional point of view to the specific issue. Only then can it analyse the problem correctly and aspire to provide an effective solution.

A REVIEW OF PREVIOUS WORKS
Multimedia: Commenting that the image of women in the mass media is changing for the worse, George Gerbner stated that media images are more a counter attack on the feminist movement as a social force for structural change, rather than a reflection of society. (Tuchman et al 1978).

A volume of researched work commissioned and published by UNESCO on women and communication issues upto 1980 stated that:
'A consistent picture emerges from those research studies which have investigated the media's portrayal of women. At the very best, the portrayal is narrow; at worst it is unrealistic, demeaning and damaging' (Gallagher 1987).

There has been an acceleration of research since 1980 as 'more emphasis was placed on the provision of summaries synthesis and reference materials; (Communication in the service of women. 1985).

'Mass Media : The Image Role and Social conditions of women' (1979) was an initial review of the work undertaken by Ceulemans and Fauconnier, they observed that the traditional role of the women were emphasized by media rather than their alternative portrayals reflecting their significant contribution in contemporary society. Secondly whereas a lot a research has been done in the developed western countries, there is a lacunae in the research effect as far as the developing countries are concerned.

In her landmark study 'Unequal opportunities the case of women and the media' by Gallagher in 1981, she focussed on media under-representation of women and women's concerns, an ambivalent attitude to women evident in certain stereotyped images in which women were exclusively and unalterably "good" and "pure" or definitely and unchangeably "bad" and "immoral".

A report prepared for the end of decade conference held in Nairobi by UNESCO in 1985 concluded that the years 1980-85 were not characterised by any radical change in the communication media in relation to women's portrayal and participation. It was found that less than half of the 95 countries who were members, carried out any research on women and media content, while globally very little was known about women's employment in media industries.

An annotated bibliography was brought out by Signiorielli (1986) found that as far as media content was concerned men out numbered women by two or three to one and they were cast in traditional and stereotypic roles.

In 1985 Gioia Longo analysed Italian daily and weekly press, women's magazines, television news, cultural programmes and advertising in Late 1984. There was no evidence of a genuine cultural response to new policies of equality for women and men. Stereotyping persists, through images, which though apparently new and modern, simply reformulate or adapt old values.

In 1986 Michele Mattelart in her work 'Women Media Crisis ? Femininity and disorder' compiled essays written between 1971 and 1982 raised two basic questions, what image of women do the media naturally promote? What change occurs in the universe of symbols during periods of crisis compared with times of relative stability? This was a global perspective of media representation of women, with mainly Latin American examples.

In 1987 Rosemary Betterton edited 'Looking on : Images of femininity in visual arts and media'. which focussed on the still images and its diverse contexts of production and consumption in advertising fine art, photography and pornography.
In the same year Kath Davies, Julienne Dickey, and Teresa Stratford edited ‘Out of focus: writings on women and the Media consisting of 40 brief articles analysing images of women in the British media—TV radio, newspaper and magazine—taking up issues of race, class, disability, sexuality and age. Final chapter provided practical advice on how stereotyped images can be challenged and changed.

Another book edited by Lea P. Stewart and Stella Ting Toomey ‘Communication, Gender and sex roles in Diverse interaction contexts’ covered interpersonal, organisational applied interaction and cultural contexts.

In 1988, Pennies, Azarcondela Cruz analysed advertisements, newspapers, weekly magazines, ‘Comics’, and pornographic magazines, television, radio and film in her book ‘From Virgin to vamp: Images of women in Philippine Media’. She found that Filipino women were portrayed either as meticulous housewives, mothers or domestics or as busy secretaries, models or mistresses though there is a trend towards change.

In the same year Irma Kaarina Halonen studied ‘the image of women in the Finnish Mass Media’ and reported on studies of the representation of women in TV, news and current affairs programmes, and in Finnish newspapers. It was found that there are still many ‘black holes’ in feminist critiques and studies of gender imagery.

In 1990, Molare Ogundipe-Leslie studied ‘The image of women and the Role of the Media in a New Political, Culture in Nigeria’, and found that the mass media portray women and issues affecting them in a manner that is predominantly negative and ‘special’ as through women were not part of ‘normal’ society. She concluded that women in Media must lead the struggle to change this stereotyped treatment.

PRINT
The message content has also been analysed via specific media institutions. In the print media most attention has been paid by research to newspapers, women’s pages and women’s magazines.

An early Lazarsfeld and Merton study found that women’s pages encouraged women to emulate the upper class and seek high status.

Women’s magazines have also been the subjects of content analysis. Though one would expect these magazines to promote the cause of women, the bulk of the research contradicts this hypothesis.

E. Barbara Phillips analysed the women portrayed in the magazine ‘Ms.’ She stated that ‘Ms.’ implied ‘women were different, but better and therefore given power, would promote a more humane world.

According to Robinson women’s magazines are beginning to portray women favorably in certain public roles (Grewe—Partsch and Robinson 1980)

Also Butler and Paisley and Marzoif dealt with content of women’s magazines, on the content of feminists press and personnel.
In 1985 Concepcion Fagoaga studied the representation of women in three quality and two popular daily newspapers in Spain and found that press conveys a masculine representation of reality.

In 1986 Marie Luise Klein concluded that the press legitimizes the marginal position of women in sport after analysing sport reports and photographs in West German newspapers.

In 1989 Teruko Inoue compared studies of more than 200 women’s, men’s and general interest magazines over an eight year period in the study ‘Reading women’s Magazines : Comparepolitan-studies of Japanese, American and Mexican Women’s Magazines’. It was found that traditional gender role has not changed, but have been simply reformulated.

In 1989 Teresa Sasinska-Kals overviewed content and messages of women's magazines in Poland.

In 1990 Angharad Valdivia studied the participation of women in the Nicaraguan revolution as reported in four newspapers (1979-1980) representing the establishment Vs left divide in the U.S. and Nicaragua.

Though Geographical and Ideological variable affected the quality and quantity of material published one factor was similar to all coverage : its scepticism of the relevance of feminism.

In the same year Juana Gallego examined the recent development of the women’s and the feminist press, also reviewing contemporary portrayal of the sexes, with reference to images of the ‘new man’ and the ‘new women’.

In 1991 Angela M.C Robbie in her study ‘Feminism and Youth Culture : from Jackie to just seventeen,’ brought together previously published and new essays including two studies of girl’s magazines, which illustrated how representation of femininity evolved between the 1970’s and the late 1980s.


**ELECTRONIC MEDIA**

Of the electronic media, television content has been most frequently and systematically analysed by researchers.

Judith Lemon’s analysis shows men are more dominant that woman except perhaps in some situation comedies.

Stephen Schultz and Joyce N. Sprafkin found that even in Saturday morning spot messages, males dominated number of appearances (Tuchman et al 1978).

Suzanne Pingree and Robert Hawkins developed a consciousness scale, which classifies media images of women in five ordered consciousness levels. They are:
1. Women as sex objects.
2. Women in traditional home and work roles.
3. Appropriating family and work roles for women.
4. Men and women can function equally.
5. Men and women are non-stereotypic.

This model can be replicated and is applicable across media. Following this model Butler and Paisley in 1980 found that most media images of women functioned largely at the first two described levels.

As a response to the growing volume of criticism directed at television programming with respect to women’s concerns, a number of countries have set up committees and commissions to intervene on behalf of women citizens.

The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications commission (CRTC) established a task force on sex-role stereotyping in the broadcast media.

Williams (1986) hypothesised that meaningful change would be noticed in television programming by the end of 1985 in her research on sex roles on Canadian and U.S. television.

Steve’s study in 1986 focuses on the contemporary goals at feminism, communication and development in the context of East Africa.

Meier’s study (1986) examined the depiction of female and male characters in Dutch TV Drama, especially in their relationship to power.

According to Zoonen (1986) the conventional notion that news content would change if the number of women journalists, producers increased, were not supported by empirical evidence. She claimed that the existence of sex and power differences must be recognised and given a regular place in research question about news production and news content.

Soha Abdel Kader (1986) studied Images of women in Drama and women’s programmes on Egyptian Television in 14 serials, 12 short plays and 40 women’s programmes. She confirms findings of other studies: female characters are younger than males; shown as mothers, wives and lovers, whereas men were portrayed as professionals.

Milko Kodama (1989) In Chapter V of the book “Women in Modern journalism” analyses women’s appearances in the main evening news of NHK (Japan) and CBS (USA) in 1974 and 1984. It was found that women newsreaders (Japan), reporters (USA) increased as did the number of women appearing as subjects of the news (both countries). But few women featured as news subjects were dynamic, decisive actors. However these developments may indicate that news values are changing to include issues previously considered ‘unnewsworthy.’

Also in 1989 Maciez Mrozowski in her study ‘Male and Female Images in Polish Television Programming’ found the differences between male and female images in Polish TV, are so marked and coherent that portrayal can
indeed be regarded as stereotyped. This misrepresents reality and contradicts the tenets of socialism.

In 1991 Milly Buonanno analysed 600 hours of Televised fiction 1988-90 and found that the protagonists are predominantly male. A few strong female characters do exist, mainly in the private sphere.

In 1991 Magda Michielsens studied the image of women as projected in 1990 by the two TV. Channels of the Belgian broadcasting organisation BRT. In her study ‘women in view’ TV. appeared to be lagging behind reality in the picture it presented of both sexes.

In the same year Lana Rakow and Kimberlie Kranich studied women as sign in TV. news’. Their analysis showed that when women do appear as sources and subjects in news, they represent women in a ritualised role; and feminist voices are usually mainstream designees of a seemingly homogenous female viewpoint.

THE INDIAN SCENARIO

On the Indian scene a multitude of articles and papers on the relationship between women and media were found.

In 1979 there were two surveys conducted by the Audience Research units of Doordarshan.

1. Report of a sample survey on Morning Transmission and Ghar Parivar


The working group on software for Doordarshan set up in 1982 published its report in 1985. Popularly known as the Joshi committee report, it contains a chapter on women & media. It was recommended that women’s dimensions should be integral to programming rather than be limited only to women’s programmes, other recommendations stressed, content focus on existing Women’s groups and struggle, significant contribution of women poets and artists, grassroots organisation and the like.

The Audience Research Units of Doordarshan and the Indian Space Research Organisation have from time to time produced various impact studies such as:


2. Women’s lives and Television as a Medium for Development : An Impact study, 1980.

In 1982 Chandiram and Agrawal noted that women continued to be portrayed in an inferior position relative to men. They also said that there is a tendency to construct a pan-Indian character of women, which is difficult to identify with any one region of India.

A study of women viewers in Madras City (Krishnaswamy 1986) pointed out that the respondents felt women’s programmes to be superficial in their
treatment of various issues. Some respondents appreciated the inclusion of male concern in women’s programmes.

Manisha Chandhary in 1987 studied Images of women through television. In an analysis of an episode of one serial, reportedly one of the many women oriented serials that ran on Indian Television in 1987 she found that at the end of a programme full of anti-women images, the heroine miraculously overcomes her repression and mouths a few sentences about her power and independence. This kind of material should be questioned by women.

In 1988 Rehana Ghadially edited ‘women in Indian society: A reader which includes there chapters on mass media: Mistreatment of women in Hindi films and portrayal of women in popular soap operas.

In 1989 Sunil K. Behara in ‘Gender Role Bias of Indian Television’ analysed Television news, fiction and advertisements carried out in 1988. He found that men are cast as masters, doers and intellectuals with women as their supporters, admirer, caretakers and entertainers. The notion of male superiority is particularly apparent in commercials. It concludes with recommendations for change.

In 1990 Prabha Krishnan and Anita Dighe in their study ‘Affirmation and denial: construction of femininity on Indian Television’ studied the wide range of programmes screened in Indian Television in 1986 and found that the output biased in favour of male elite’s. Masculine and feminine genders are constructed as polar opposites. A few heroic women are shown but usually cast as redeemers of patriarchy. The trend to commercialisation creates new contradictions. They concluded that widespread media education was needed for both male & female audience.

Neelam Bhardwaj and B. Kumar studied ‘women in Newspapers. A study of four leading Indian Dailies to find out the relative coverage given to women and women issues by elite Indian Dailies. It also looks into the different content categories of news on women, carried by the newspapers and the relative emphasis as reflected in the distribution of news contents across categories. The findings revealed that most of the items on women that appeared in newspapers are lagging behind in their role as purveyors of social change.

In 1992 Nandini Prasad in her book ‘A pressing matter: women in Press’, analysed news coverage on women in four leading Indian dailies “The Hindu, the Hindustan Times”, ‘Indian Express’ and ‘The Times of India’. She found that common woman found no place in the dailies – only the privileged and the political did. Whenever women’s issues do find coverage, the bias against them exists.

In the same year Rama Jha in her book ‘Women and the Indian Print Media – Portrayal and performance’, also studied the women as covered in the Indian Print Media – and the hurdles before them.

In 1994 Amnu Joseph and Kalpana Sharma in their book ‘Whose news: The
media and women's issues' viewed critically the messages conveyed by the mass media, especially with regard to women, and develop an understanding of the factors which govern and shape media content and emphasis.

A study by Vimala Bala Subramanyam in 1989 called 'Mirror image' also provided excellent overviews on the subject of women portrayed in the media.

But in general as the UNESCO survey has shown very little is known about women and communication in the developing world. The area is thus wide open to both empirical and theoretical work.

REFERENCE